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ABSTRACT

This publication is designed to help educators learn how to communicate effectively with the citizens of their communities. It presents a summary of school public information practices drawn from national and Tennessee samples. The monograph contains a discussion of recommended public information techniques for schools and educators derived from responses to the study and a review of recent literature. These techniques can be used by educational administrators in organizing and conducting public information programs. An appendix contains the survey instrument used in the national study of 441 school districts. An extensive bibliography is also included. (Author/DN)

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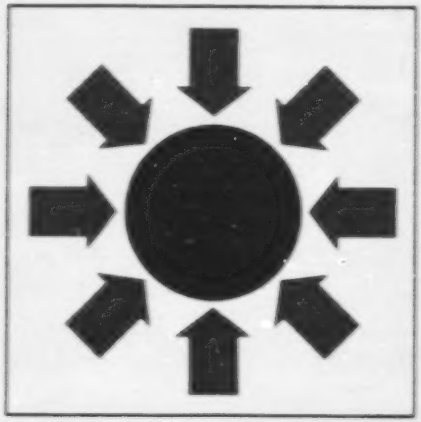

PUBLIC INFORMATION PRACTICES IN EDUCATION: A STUDY OF TECHNIQUES

DOUGLAS C. NORMAN AND CHARLES M. ACHILLES

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I. INTRODUCTION

This monograph is divided into four major sections:
I. An *introduction* which discusses the purposes and sets forth the rationale of the monograph.
II. A *summary of the findings of a study of public information techniques* employed by a national sample of school districts, ranging in enrollment from those with fewer than 12,000 pupils to those with more than 100,000 pupils.
III. A *discussion of recommended public information techniques* for schools and educators drawn from responses to the study and a review of recent literature, which can be used by educational administrators in organizing and conducting public information programs.
IV. A *resume of a study of public information practices in Tennessee* using a stratified random sample of 15 and a selected sample of eight school districts.

This publication is designed to help educators communicate within a complex society in which citizens are likely to have less personal contact with their children's schools. Urbanization, industrialization, mobility of families, and school consolidation are but some of the factors contributing to less community involvement with public education. How then can citizens obtain the information they need to make intelligent judgments about the effectiveness of education and the support which they should give it? An obvious way is through the mass communications media, especially newspapers, radio stations, and television stations. The mass media provide educators with channels to use in reaching large numbers of persons in a short time and at a low per-person cost. These media are the most available means for creating an awareness of and interest in public education; school systems hardly can ignore them even if they cannot prove the often expressed assumption that citizens will support education if they are adequately informed about it.

Since the nature of Twentieth Century education is such that citizens often have little opportunity for direct involvement in the schools, cooperation between educators and journalists ultimately may benefit many of those citizens wishing to achieve a better understanding of public education and perhaps will interest others in seeking such an understanding. Whether educators wish it or not, they will have some kind of relationship with the mass media. Schools are too much a part of today's society and affect, directly or indirectly, the lives of too many citizens to be ignored. Even if teachers and school administrators actively shun the news media, there will be times when reporters seek them out, usually in connection with controverisal events, a fact which gives the impression that journalists are interested only in the negative aspects of education. There probably also will be occasions when educators who dislike publicity must, perhaps grudgingly, seek out newspapermen and broadcasters to ask publicity for certain events or dissemination of some information.

Despite the growing need for cooperation between education and the mass media, considerable misunderstanding and some suspicion exist between these two social forces. "Mutal suspicion, mutual need" could well describe the uneasy relationship between educators and journalists. Educators consider many media representatives to be ill-informed about education, to concentrate on sensational "bad news," and to ignore quiet but beneficial day-to-day activities in the schools. They notice that interscholastic athletics, school board meetings and budgets, and extracurricular activities are far better covered by newspapers and broadcasting stations than what goes on in classrooms and laboratories.

Journalists, on the other hand, may consider educators unable to recognize newsworthy material or to prepare unbiased, jargon-free news releases.

The school public information officer can help ease the suspicion between educators and journalists and emphasize the mutual needs of the two groups, resulting in a greater flow of information about the public schools to the public.

The studies of school public information practices in national and Tennessee samples of public school systems as reported in this monograph were based on the following assumptions:

1. Techniques should be identified which educators can use in planning and implementing programs to inform the public about the public schools through the mass media.

2. News media—principally newspapers, radio stations, and television stations—can serve as mediating agencies between schools and citizens.

3. The media provide ways for educators to communicate with large numbers of persons in a short time and at a low per-person cost.

4. Newspapers, radio, and television are the mass media most accessible to, and most likely to be used by, educators as channels of communication to reach public audiences.

5. Even if school systems do not have formal communication programs, educators and journalists will likely be working together with increasing frequency. This professional association will be more satisfactory and beneficial to both groups if educators and journalists are knowledgeable about each others' field.

6. Through research and study of related literature, techniques can be identified which can be used in a suggested program of school public information by persons who have not had intensive training in communications.

Definition of Terms.

Important terms used in this report are defined as follows:

Mass Media. Independently owned and controlled newspapers, radio stations, and television stations which serve as channels of communication with large numbers of citizens within a community or region.

Public Information. Primarily a one-way system for informing public groups about an organization and its programs, usually by means of print or electronic material prepared by the organization for the mass media but also involving institutional cooperation with media-initiated coverage.

Public Information Officer (PIO). An administrator responsible for conducting and/or directing a school system's public information program.

Public Relations. A program of two-way communication between schools and various internal and external publics, involving both interpersonal and impersonal, formal and informal contacts, and designed to promote public understanding of, and support for, education.

Publics. Different groups with whom schools wish to communicate. Some are within a school organization, such as teachers, pupils, and administrators; some are outside the organization, such as parents, taxpayers who do not have children in school, governmental officials, and community organizations.

Public School Systems. Tax-supported school systems listed in the *Education Directory* of the U.S. Office of Education.

II. NATIONAL PUBLIC INFORMATION PRACTICES

In 1972 a study was conducted to determine the public information practices and techniques used by a national sample of 441 school systems, stratified according to five enrollment groups. These groups were as follows:

Stratum 1	More than 100,000 pupils
Stratum 2	50,000-99,999
Stratum 3	25,000-49,999
Stratum 4	12,000-24,999
Stratum 5	Fewer than 12,000 pupils.

"Public information" was defined as an essentially one-way means of communicating with public groups through the mass media of newspapers, radio, and television. Secondary purposes of the study were to gain school administrators' perceptions of the media's coverage of school news and their recommendations for improving this coverage, their own public information programs, and higher education's training of school administrators for working with the news media.

A questionnaire which had been validated in an earlier pilot study in Tennessee was sent to 640 public school systems, or approximately 10 percent of those in the United States, and a 68.9 percent return (441 usable questionnaires) was achieved. Additional information was gained from follow-up letters.

Major findings of the study were as follows:

1. Sixty-nine percent of the responding school systems had public information officers (PIOs). Of these, approximately 57 percent were on a full-time basis. Full-time PIOs were concentrated among systems with enrollments above 25,000; part-time information officers most frequently were found in systems with enrollments of fewer than 25,000.

2. Most PIOs supplied written news releases to the mass media, although the average number of articles written each month and the number of copies duplicated and distributed varied rather widely. Responding systems most often reported a monthly average of 15 to 24 articles written, with 6 to 24 copies of each release distributed to the news media.

3. Releases were distributed mainly to local and regional news media, although Stratum 1 systems also had considerable distribution among national outlets.

4. Fewer than 20 percent of the systems produced regularly-scheduled radio and television programs or provided speakers and/or materials for such programs. Although radio stations were a major channel of communications for many small communities, systems with enrollments of fewer than 25,000 made less use of the broadcast media than did larger systems in urban areas.

5. Special services provided the news media by school systems tended to emphasize printed materials, especially those related to school board matters, and were less concerned with assistance to radio and television stations.

6. More than 40 percent of the systems reported collecting feedback from public groups and making this available to top administrators, although respondents' comments suggested that feedback collection often was informal rather than scientific in nature.

7. About 90 percent of the respondents said that both school systems and the news media could improve their services to one another—the schools in regard to their information programs and the news media in regard to their coverage of education.

8. Respondents noted that interscholastic athletics, school board meetings, extracurricular activities, and school system budgets and appropriations were better covered by the news media, both quantitatively and qualitatively, than were educational innovations, local educational trends, classroom and laboratory learning activities, and federally funded programs.

9. School administrators said that they could best improve their services to the mass media by providing more news releases, more still photographs and television film, and more assistance to broadcasting stations. They placed somewhat lower priority on securing additional personnel for their public information programs.

10. The same respondents indicated that newspapers and broadcasting stations could most improve their coverage of education by encouraging reporters to have more first-hand experiences with the schools, by emphasizing more of the positive side of school news, and by initiating more school coverage.

11. Providing more insight into problems of the news media and presenting inservice programs on public information

techniques were seen as two major ways that universities could train those who need to interpret education to the public through the media. There also was strong support for short-term workshops and seminars and for public information guidelines which could be furnished school administrators by university departments. Respondents' comments to open-ended questions indicated considerable support for preparing specialists for the school public information field—professionals equally at home in education and journalism. A number of respondents suggested that such training could best be accomplished through interdisciplinary programs offered jointly by colleges of education and colleges of communications.

Special services provided the news media as a part of school public information programs are summarized in Table I. Responses are given for each of the five enrollment groups and then for the total number of systems participating in the study.

TABLE I

SPECIAL SERVICES PROVIDED MEDIA BY SCHOOL SYSTEMS

	Number and Percent of Systems Responding by Enrollment Group (Stratum)					
Service	1 N=23	2 N=44	3 N=74	4 N=152	5 N=148	Total N=441
Broadcast Releases	15	34	31	58	36	174
	65.2%	77.3%	41.9%	38.2%	24.3%	39.5%
Telephoned Story Tips	19	40	52	86	54	251
	82.6%	90.9%	70.3%	56.6%	36.5%	56.9%
Still Photos	17	25	44	92	90	268
	73.9%	56.8%	59.5%	60.5%	60.8%	60.8%
Tapes for Radio	13	13	19	35	21	101
	56.5%	29.5%	25.7%	23.0%	14.2%	22.9%
Film/Tapes for TV	7	4	7	18	7	43
	30.4%	9.1%	9.5%	11.8%	4.7%	9.8%
Slides	9	11	7	24	6	57
	39.1%	25.0%	9.5%	15.8%	4.1%	12.9%
Beeper Reports	16	24	25	38	17	120
	69.6%	54.5%	33.8%	25.0%	11.5%	27.2%
Board Agendas	18	31	69	122	99	339
	78.3%	70.5%	93.2%	80.3%	66.9%	76.9%
Printed Background (Local)	15	35	57	114	98	319
	65.2%	79.5%	77.0%	75.0%	66.2%	72.3%
Printed Background (National)	3	8	21	40	43	115
	13.0%	18.2%	28.4%	26.3%	29.1%	26.1%
Board Minutes	17	26	34	96	81	254
	73.9%	59.1%	45.9%	63.2%	54.7%	57.6%

Stratum 1: More than 100,000 pupils
Stratum 2: 50,000 - 99,000 pupils
Stratum 3: 25,000 - 49,999 pupils
Stratum 4: 12,000 - 24,999 pupils
Stratum 5: Fewer than 12,000 pupils

About nine out of every ten respondents participating in the study thought that educators and the mass media could better serve one another. They said that schools should provide more news releases, more still photographs and television film, and more assistance to broadcasting stations. They did not, however, place a correspondingly high priority on securing additional personnel to help provide these services. The same respondents said that the mass media should encourage reporters to have more first-hand experiences with the schools and should initiate more coverage of education.

The study also found that the majority of information services provided by school systems are for the print media, especially newspapers, despite the great growth of radio and television since the end of World War II. Smaller school districts were far less active in communicating with the public through radio and television than systems with more than 25,000 pupils. This was true even though many small towns, perhaps a majority of those in the nation, depend upon local or nearby radio stations for their main source of daily news. This source is, of course, supplemented by the weekly newspapers, but for coverage of day-to-day happenings, residents in rural and small town areas usually tune to the newscasts of low-power radio stations in their county seat towns. The national study showed that school systems with fewer than 12,000 pupils did little to provide these stations either with news releases especially written to broadcast needs or with audio tape, which surely would be welcomed by most stations.

Smaller systems also furnished the media with fewer specialized services than did their big brother systems. These services include slides for television, telephoned "beeper" reports for broadcasting stations which could be recorded for later release, and story tips telephoned to reporters working for any of the media.

The need for organized public information activity among the smaller systems of the country actually may be greater than among the larger districts. A survey of administrators' perceptions of the news media's coverage of education indicated that small systems may be served by newspapers and broadcasting stations which are especially prone to emphasize the surface events of education, such as interscholastic athletics and extracurricular activities. Some of the small suburban systems in the shadow of giant urban districts reported considerable difficulty in competing with their urban neighbors for space and air time among metropolitan news media. The survey returns thus seemed to indicate that those systems which needed extensive public information programs most, in terms of their relationships with the news media, actually were doing the least to bring about these programs.

Despite the situation revealed by the study, public information programs appear within reach of almost any school system. Despite the generally gloomy findings of the study in regard to small systems, there were some with fewer than 12,000 pupils which had well rounded programs for communicating with public groups through the mass media. It may be that large systems have information programs not only because of available funds and personnel (there surely must be proportionally as large a demand for those funds), but also because their proximity to a large number of news outlets makes administrators more aware of these channels of communication. The aggressiveness of these media, brought about in part by their being in competition with other media in the same area, also could make school administrators more aware of the media and the need for a school program designed to serve them. The most essential elements for successful operation of school public information programs may be recognition among school administrators of 1) a need for these activities, 2) the public's right to knowledge of and interest in education, and 3) the range of opportunities for communication afforded by the mass communications media.

If this interest and support exist, a district should employ someone who has public information responsibilities as a specific part of his job description. Systems in the national study with full-time or part-time information officers were far more active in disseminating information to community groups than those without such personnel. If possible, a district should employ a person who has had experience and training in both education and journalism. Finding this person may be difficult, considering the relative lack of contact between education and journalism and the only occasional cross-over between the two professions. But even inexperienced PIOs should be encouraged to learn what they can about both fields with a goal of becoming specialists in disseminating information about education to public groups through the mass media.

Since specific courses in school public information appear to be limited, PIOs must supplement formal study with personal reading, professional meetings, observation, conversation, and on-the-job training as their chief means of personal growth. A few dollars a year invested in publications of the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA), for instance, will provide a wealth of information. The PIO certainly should not overlook what he can learn, as well as the personal contacts he can make, by becoming a frequent visitor to the newspaper and broadcasting stations which he depends on to disseminate information about his school district. However, just as many school information officers are not familiar with the mass media, many journalists are not familiar with education. It may be difficult for the journalist to communicate

totally with the PIO about education coverage; the reporter or editor may be unaware of many opportunities for news stories which exist in education. It may be possible for a mutual orientation process to take place, with both the PIO and the journalist "educating" each other about their respective fields.

Assuming that personnel are available for school information programs, a number of specific techniques exist which may be helpful in communicating with public groups through the mass media. These techniques were suggested by the national study of school public information practices and by an extensive review of recent literature. Techniques used by the successful school PIO also will be dictated in part by local problems and by strategies which he may adopt or improvise in attempting to solve them.

The following section summarizes certain techniques which may be of value to a school information officer, in a large system or in one quite small, as he attempts to do his job. All of the techniques may not be useful to every PIO. If it is true, as one author implied, that American educators are too insulated from each other, then this list may be of value in acquainting PIOs with what their counterparts across the country are doing, and perhaps in suggesting helpful new approaches to their tasks.

III. RECOMMENDED PUBLIC INFORMATION TECHNIQUES

Even the smallest system without a designated information officer should have one or more system-level persons designated to inform local journalists about story possibilities, to invite reporters to the schools on a regular basis, and to assist them in arranging interviews and securing needed information. To do this, the person need not necessarily be a skillful writer or even a public information specialist. Learning what is news and what are the requirements and problems of the media is within reach of most; analytical reading of newspapers, listening to radio, and viewing of television, along with the occasional visits to media offices already mentioned, will help the novice or part-time PIO acquire a rough background for initiating public information activity. He can supplement his self-education with any meaningful inservice or workshop programs offered by nearby colleges or universities. The essential elements are his interest and commitment to keeping the public informed about education.

Assuming that personnel are available for public information programs, there are a number of specific techniques which may be helpful in communicating with public groups through the mass media. Among them are the following:

1. Articles about scheduled events should be prepared in advance. Photographs of speakers or others involved in programs should be provided newspapers before an event occurs.

2. Follow-up reports should be given to news media as soon as possible after completion of an event. PIOs should know the news and film deadlines of all media with which they work—deadlines are especially important for newspapers and television stations. The PIO should know what method of transmitting the follow-up stories a particular outlet prefers. It may want him to telephone information to a reporter, who will write the story; or the PIO may be requested to

write the story and dictate it to a reporter by telephone, bring or mail it to the outlet's office, or, in the case or regional news media covering an outlying school system, send material by bus or telegram. In the last-mentioned case, the school PIO should understand what collect charges a newspaper or braodcasting station will accept.

3. The PIO should investigate the possibility of telephoning local or regional radio stations and dictating stories to be taped and played on later newscasts. This simple and fast way to get radio news coverage also enables radio stations to have another voice on their newscasts.

4. News releases should be written to conform to requirements of different media. Releases for radio and television stations usually are shorter, more repetitious, and written in a more conversational style than those intended for newspapers.

5. To schedule programs about local schools, PIOs should take advantage of public service requirements of broadcasting stations and of their need for guests on the growing number of talk shows and audience participation shows. Programs can be on a regular basis or when there is a current topic of sufficient interest to attract a considerable audience. Rather than producing programs which are scheduled at off-hours, when the listening or viewing audience is small, PIOs may better concentrate on news stories, audio tapes, slides, and film for regularly scheduled newscasts.

6. The PIO should explore local program possibilities over cable television.

7. The school PIO should let his relationships with media representatives determine whether he concentrates on writing and distributing releases or on furnishing suggestions and information to journalists who prefer to develop and write their own stories. Reporters in urban settings probably will write more of their own material, but based upon findings of this study, they may ask the help of school PIOs in securing material, identifying sources of news, and arranging interviews. On the other hand, it appears likely that the PIO in a rural or small-town setting may need to furnish as much of his material as possible in finished form to understaffed media.

8. The school board is the instrument of public control of local schools. Its meetings and decisions are of considerable interest to the news media throughout the country. Public information officers can help journalists cover school board activities by providing printed agendas in advance of scheduled meetings, clarifying board actions, furnishing background information to help reporters interpret board decisions, and seeing that interested media have follow-up summaries of board meetings.

9. The visual possibilities of school news stories always should be considered. If the system PIO does not have the training

or equipment to take still photographs for newspapers or motion picture film for television, he should ask local media to send photographers to cover important stories.

10. Still photographs made by school cameramen should be posed in accordance with generally accepted newspaper practice, including a limited number of persons per picture and real or simulated action around one center of interest.

11. In compiling his mailing list, the school PIO should not overlook newspapers and broadcasting stations which cover his district on a regional basis. These channels of communication may supplement those provided by local media, although it is likely that a system will receive more coverage from hometown journalists than from those some distance away. The information officer should nevertheless establish a working relationship with local correspondents for regional media.

12. Information officers should encourage journalists to become informed about national trends in education and to interpret the effects of these trends on local schools. An important function of the school PIO may be to educate local journalists about education so that they will be better able to cover it. School information officers should attempt to expand journalists' concepts of school news, especially encouraging them to consider teaching and learning activities as topics for stories.

13. An important function of the school PIO can be to encourage media representatives to make more visits to local schools and to have more first-person contacts with administrators, teachers, and students. The school PIO should maintain a file of information about system personnel and photographs of well-known teachers and administrators. He should have the trust of the superintendent and be a member of his system's top-level administrative team. Only by being well informed himself can the PIO fulfill his function as an encoder of messages about education for others.

14. News releases should be duplicated so that they are legible and easily read.

15. The information officer can serve as a boundary person between several groups, interpreting schools to the public, the public to school administrators, educators to journalists, and the media to teachers and administrators.

16. The information officer also can serve to bring together the news media and the school administration through regularly scheduled press conferences which he arranges and perhaps moderates.

17. The school PIO should consider sending brief written digests of school news to reporters, who can develop them into full-length stories. This will be helpful to an information officer who has

other duties, provided that the journalists are accustomed to developing education articles on their own.

18. Full-length feature stories slanted toward a particular audience or audiences, such as parents, should be developed.

19. Today's school information officer should encourage the mass media to do more analysis, background writing, and in-depth coverage of education's issues and trends.

20. The PIO should not produce stories exclusively for one news outlet which is in a competitive situation. He should, however, encourage media representatives to develop as many of their own exclusive reports as possible as a means of promoting local initiative among journalists.

21. The PIO should continually evaluate the effectiveness of his program. It is of little value to send out large numbers of news releases if few are used. As one Stratum 1 PIO noted, "It is helpful to check use of releases against the number issued." Submitting too much material to the media can be counter-productive. Another respondent advised school PIOs to "establish a reputation for submitting only timely and worthwhile information."

22. A major task of the school PIO is to cut through jargon and describe educational programs in simple, straightforward language.

23. Spot announcements 30 and 60 seconds long which are broadcast several times by radio stations may be helpful in promoting scheduled events and in making the public more aware of little-known aspects of school programs.

24. A major concern of the new PIO should be to establish his contacts within his own school system and to encourage educators to submit material or suggestions which may be developed into news stories.

25. The PIO must be aware of media time pressures and even be willing to interrrupt administrative meetings to get information needed by a news writer trying to meet a deadline.

26. Small systems which are unable to budget for even a part-time PIO may wish to investigate employing free lance writers or college journalism teachers or students on an hourly basis. Other systems may find it advisable to contract with professional public relations firms for the operation of their public information programs. Several neighboring systems may wish to pool resources and employ a PIO on a cooperative, or regional, basis.

27. Use of the mass media as part of structured programs to encourage feedback from public groups should be considered.

28. The school PIO should be employed for the calendar year to allow him to plan, film school scenes, write information stories and develop his own schedule and calendar.

IV. SCHOOL INFORMATION PRACTICES IN TENNESSEE

A preliminary form of the questionnaire used in the national study of school public information practices was sent to a number of Tennessee systems stratified according to net enrollment. The sample systems were chosen at random within the enrollment classifications; 12 of 15 questionnaires were returned. The survey instrument also was sent to eight additional systems identified by the Tennessee Education Association as having system-wide information officers (PIOs). Six were returned and tabulated along with those from the stratified random sample, giving a study N of 18. Although the latter returns probably biased the sample somewhat, it was thought that those actually working in school public information programs could offer useful insights into certain aspects of the survey, especially what colleges and universities could do to improve preparation of school administrators for working with the mass media, and could be helpful in validating other parts of the questionnaire as well.

In the total sample, three systems had full-time PIOs. Seven had persons assigned to work with the media on a part-time basis, and eight systems had no one assigned to public information duties. At least two of the PIOs had part-time teaching duties. Others were administrators who devoted part of their attention to attendance, supervision of instruction or food services, and to the superintendency itself.

Nine systems supplied local news media with written news releases, with the mean number of releases distributed monthly by all respondents seven and the median four. Six systems regularly supplied news media with still photographs, five with radio tapes, one with motion picture film or video tapes for television, and two with slides for television. Seven regularly made available to news media agendas of forthcoming school board meetings, seven

distributed printed background material on local schools, and nine passed on to the media printed material from state and national education associations.

Six of the responding systems had not invited representatives of local news media to cover educational events in their schools during the past year. The number of invitations issued by other systems during the same period ranged from two to 75, with a median of 15. Six systems provided speakers and/or materials, such as scripts or illustrations, for regularly scheduled radio and/or television programs.

Respondents were asked to rank different aspects of their system's educational programs according to the quality and quantity of local press coverage each aspect received. Composite rankings, in order from best to poorest coverage, were as follows:

1. Interscholastic athletics
2. School board meetings and activities
3. School extracurricular activities
4. System budgets and appropriations
5. Trends in local educational practices
6. Local educational innovations
7. Learning activities in the classroom and laboratory.

Five PIOs indicated that they regularly analyzed feedback from different publics and reported opinion trends and implications to superintendents and other administrators.

A number of open-ended questions were included in the survey instrument. Those questions and typical responses (some paraphrased) were as follows:

A. *"In what other ways, besides writing and distributing press releases, does the PIO assist the media?"*
   1. Telephoned local newspapers, arranged for a photographer to cover school-related stories, and sometimes went with him to set up pictures and get information for outlines and accompanying stories.
   2. Notified reporters of various items, which they then could cover on their own if interested.
   3. Supervised school reports for the teen page in a local paper.

One respondent noted: "The local news media prefer to do their own news gathering." He indicated that he limited himself to personal contacts and to maintaining liaison between individual schools and the press.

B. *"How do you think the mass media can better cover news of education in your system?"*
   1. "Emphasize the many good things."

2. "By having a regularly assigned education writer who wants to learn more about our schools."
3. "Radio and television could have education editors as both our newspapers have." (This reply was from a metropolitan system.)
4. "By reporting the routine as well as the spectacular."
5. "Cover *all* extracurricular activities as avidly as they do [sports]."
6. "More frequent visits to the schools."
7. "Thoroughly understand background facts surrounding issues reported."
8. "More personal contacts [with school personnel] rather than by telephone."
9. "By designating one person to be responsible [for education news] rather than everyone, and no one doing much of a job."

In reply to this question, one respondent wrote, "They [the news media] do an adequate job." Another said, "Doing the best they can."

C. "*In what respects, if any, do you think your system can better serve and assist local news media?*"
   1. "More information should be made available to [the media]."
   2. "More releases, regular press visits in the schools, more photos, slides, film clips."
   3. "Select the best qualified person from the school system to do the reporting."
   4. "By having a public relations person on the staff."
   5. "Write more in-depth articles for newspapers."
   6. "Frequent consultation and planning with representatives of the news media."

Nine respondents indicated that a specific person or persons within a school system should be designated to work with the mass media, and most implied that this person should have special qualifications for that task.

D. "*How, in your opinion, can colleges and universities help present and future educational administrators learn to work more effectively with the news media?*"
   1. "Provide more instruction in educational public relations."
   2. "Have a good course or two taught by someone who *knows* the business—*not theory*."

3. "Teach [administrators] to write; teach them the type of thing news media want and how to angle what the school wants in that direction."
4. "Through courses."
5. "Supply [public information] guidelines which would offer directions to the administrator."
6. "Such a course could be offered in the administration curriculum."
7. "Give [administrators] journalism experience and *better* and more *practical* courses in community involvement."
8. "Emphasize importance of working with news media."
9. "A course could be worked in or required that administrators could take during their college work."
10. "Set up seminars dealing with P.R."
11. "Emphasize the importance of clear and effective public speaking."
12. "Teach [administrators] to write or present their views clearly, succinctly, printably."
13. "Offer [administrators] some kind of insight into the pressure of a newspaper editor or [broadcast] program director."

Several conclusions can be drawn from the returns. All three systems with full-time PIO s were in metropolitan areas; in the seven systems with part-time information officers, the programs seemed to range from those which were active and well-intentioned to those of a casual nature and with seemingly low priority in the systems' overall operations. Materials sent to the media seemed to be print-oriented, with only a third of the systems regularly providing any especially written for broadcasters.

The small number of news releases sent monthly to local media by responding systems seemed to indicate that few administrators in these systems had the time, ability, or confidence to turn out a sizable number of stories. In the large metropolitan systems, PIOs apparently acted primarily to assist newsmen who preferred to write their own stories. It can be assumed from the other responses that newspapers and broadcasting stations in small and medium-sized towns and cities did not have the staff members to cover such education news first-hand and that a system-wide PIO with ability and journalism training possibly could help increase the system's coverage.

Tennessee educators participating in the survey seemed to agree with the criticisms of media coverage of the schools as voiced in the national study and reported in the text of this monograph. They perceived that newspapers and broadcasting stations

were concentrating on sports and school extracurricular activities with a relative lack of interest in such topics as teaching and learning experiences. The respondents apparently thought that colleges of education and colleges of mass communications could cooperate to offer school administrators helpful training in the techniques of public information programs.

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Appendix

QUESTIONNAIRE USED IN NATIONAL STUDY
PRELIMINARY DATA

1. Name of responding school system _____

2. Location of superintendent's office _____
(City)
_____
(County) (State) (Zip Code)

3. System's net enrollment (Please check one)
__100,000 or more __25,000-49,999 under
__ 50,000-99,999 __12,000-24,999 __12,000

4. Please give the name and office telephone number (including area code) of a person who may be contacted for additional information in connection with this survey.
Name _____
Office Phone _____

5. (a) What is one of the principal newspapers serving your school district?
Newspaper _____
City Published _____

(b) What is one of the principal radio stations serving your school district?
Station _____
City (Site of studios) _____

(c) What is one of the principal television stations serving your school district?
Station _____
City (Site of studios) _____

PUBLIC INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Does your district have a system-wide public information officer or coordinator assigned to work with and through the news media (newspapers, radio and television stations) in keeping the public informed about local education:

   (a) on a full-time basis? ___ yes ___ no (b) on a part-time basis? ___ yes ___ no

(Respond to the remainder of Question Number 1 and Question 2 through 4 only if your system has a full or part-time public information officer (PIO). Everyone should respond to Questions 5 through 12. Thank you very much.)

(c) If part-time, approximately what percentage of the PIO's work time does he devote to the news media?

(1) ____ less than 25 percent
(2) ____ 25-49 percent
(3) ____ 50-74 percent
(4) ____ 75 percent or more but less than 100 percent

(d) What is his formal title? _____

_____

(e) What other duties, if any, does the PIO perform in your school system?

(1) ____ Superintendent
(2) ____ Supervisor of instruction
(3) ____ Attendance teacher
(4) ____ Journalism teacher and/or student publications' advisor

(5) Other (please specify in space below)

_____

_____

_____

(f) How many assistants does the PIO have for his duties involving the news media?

	Full-Time	Part-Time	% of Time
Writers, editors	_____	_____	_____
Clerical, secretarial	_____	_____	_____
News media specialists (Radio, TV, etc.)	_____	_____	_____
Others (please specify in space below)	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

(g) Please include as much of the following information as possible about your system's PIO.

(1) Bachelor's degree in _____
(major field)

(2) Master's degree in _____
(major field)

(3) Doctorate in _____
(major field)

(4) Years' experience in news media _____

(5) Years' experience in education _____

(6) Years' experience in other public information positions (please specify type of company or institution)

_____

_____

_____

2. Does the public information officer (PIO) prepare written news releases for:

(a) Local news media?
___yes
___no

(b) Regional news media?
___yes
___no

(c) National news media?
___yes
___no

3. (a) What is the average number of news stories written by the PIO and his assistants (if any) *each month*?

(1) ____ fewer than 5 (3) ____ 15-24
(2) ____ 5-14 (4) ____ 25 or more

(b) On the average, how many copies of releases are sent to news media each month? (Can include multiple copies of one story.)

(1) ____ Fewer than 5 (4) ____ 100-499
(2) ____ 5-24 (5) ____ 500 or more
(3) ____ 25-99

(c) Are separate stories written especially for broadcast media to conform to their time limitations and style?

____ yes ____ no

(d) Does the system PIO and/or his staff regularly telephone to the news media information which can be developed into stories by reporters?

____ yes ____ no

4. In what other ways does the PIO assist the news media?

_____

_____

_____

(Please respond to all of the following items. Thank you.)

5. Please check each of the following items which your system provides to local news media on a regular basis:

____ Still photographs
____ Radio tapes
____ Motion-picture film or video tapes for television
____ 35 mm. color slides
____ "Beeper" telephone reports for radio news
____ Advance agendas of school board meetings
____ Printed background material on local schools and personnel
____ Printed background material from state and national education associations
____ Minutes of school board meetings
____ Others (Please specify.)

_____

_____

_____

6. Please indicate the approximate number of times during the past school year that your office invited representatives of local news media to cover events in your school system.

___None ___7-12
___1-6 ___More than 12

7. Please indicate the broadcast schedule of any radio and/or television programs for which your system regularly provides speakers and/or scripts.

_____Daily _____ Monthly _____No regular programs
_____Weekly _____ Other (Please specify schedule.) _____

8. Please rank the aspects of your system's program according to the quality and quantity of local news coverage each receives from each of three major news media. In the first column, put "1" by the item receiving the best coverage from local newspapers, "2" by the item receiving the next best coverage, and so on through "8" or "9." Repeat the procedure in the second column for coverage of education by local radio stations and in the third column for television stations, if applicable.

Newspapers	Radio	TV	Aspects of Program
_____	_____	___	Interscholastic athletics
_____	_____	___	Other extracurricular activities of schools
_____	_____	___	School board meetings and activities
_____	_____	___	School system budgets and appropriations
_____	_____	___	Trends in local educational practices
_____	_____	___	Local educational innovations
_____	_____	___	Learning activities in the classroom and laboratory
_____	_____	___	Federally funded programs
_____	_____	___	Others (Please specify in space below.)

_____

_____

_____

9. (a) Does your system regularly collect and analyze feedback from its different publics?

___yes ___ no

(b) If so, are trends and implications of public opinion usually reported to your superintendent and other interested administrators?

___yes ___no

(c) Please indicate method and frequency of any feedback collection.

10. (a) Do you think news media can improve their coverage of education in your system?

___yes ___no

(b) If "yes," in what way(s) do you think the media can improve their coverage? (Please check as many as appropriate.)

___ Emphasizing "good news" more
___ Regularly assigned education reporters
___ More frequent visits by media representatives to schools
___ More initiative by local media in developing stories about education
___ Newsmen who are better informed about education in general and local school problems and progress in particular
___ Others (Please specify in space below.)

_____
_____
_____

11. (a) Do you think your system can better serve and assist local news media?

___yes ___no

(b) If "yes," in what way(s) do you think your system can help the news media? (Please check as many as appropriate.)

___ Providing a full-time PIO to work with media
___ Adding writer/editor assistants to present staff
___ More news releases
___ More photographs, film clips, slides
___ More emphasis on broadcast media
___ A system representative assigned to work with media on a part-time basis
___ Others (Please specify in space below.)

_____
_____
_____

12. How, in your opinion, can colleges and universities help present and future school administrators learn to work more effectively with the news media? (Please check as many as appropriate.)

_____ No help needed; administrators doing adequate job now
_____ Special survey courses taught by education professors
_____ Special survey courses taught by journalism professors
_____ Short-term, on-campus workshops or seminars
_____ Special in-service programs held in local districts
_____ "How to" manuals for educators
_____ Guidelines for improving local public relations programs
_____ Special courses in news writing for educators
_____ Providing insight into problems faced by news media
_____ Others (please specify)

_____

_____

_____

Note: We will appreciate your enclosing any copies of representative news releases sent by your system to the mass media, or other material which may be of value to this study. Please use extra pages for additional comments on any part of the questionnaire or other phases of school public information programs.

If you wish a summary of the findings from this study, please give the address to which it should be mailed:

_____

_____